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Peacemaking in Africa: The experience of ACCORD

Editor's Note: The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) is a non-governmental conflict management institution based in Durban, South Africa. ACCORD was established in 1992 to promote conflict resolution in South Africa. The institution's focus has since broadened to include the whole of the African continent. ACCORD strives to offer innovative and effective African solutions to African challenges. Through its work over the last 20 years, ACCORD has developed a comprehensive peace model, officially recognized by the United Nations in 1996 as a viable model for Africa. In December 2012, Vasu Gounden, ACCORD's founder and Executive Director, sat down with Global Centre for Pluralism to discuss ACCORD's origins and current work.



What inspired you to become a peacemaker?

There are three ways to resolve conflict. The first is you can go to war. Or you can go to court. Or you can mediate. The first part of my life, I went to war as a political activist in South Africa. I left South Africa in 1979 to join our liberation movement, so I did that part for a good decade. Then I was a lawyer, so I did the going-to-court stuff. For the last 20 years, I've been mediating and I think I've always had a belief – even as a student activist and as a political activist – that you have to engage with your opponent. Mandela is famous for saying, “There's no point in talking to your friends. You need to talk to your enemy.” I think that's what drove me to set up an institute that could broker agreements. That's why we have ACCORD, which is really what we do – reach accords.

What does ACCORD do?

Today, we're the largest conflict management organization in Africa and one of the top five globally. We have about 100 full-time staff and we're operational in around 28 countries in Africa. Most notably, we're in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the DRC. We've been there since 1999, Somalia since 1999 and Burundi since 1995. What do we do in all of these conflict situations? We assist mediators by analyzing conflicts and devising strategies, or we ourselves mediate on the ground in different conflict situations. This work is both at a high level, so we work at a political level brokering between rebel groups and governments. But we also work at the grassroots level with community conflicts. For example, in Sudan right now we're involved in what is the real controversial nub of the conflict between the north and the south regions – Abyei between the Ngok Dinka and the Mesiriya. Two communities are pastoralists and agriculturalists. What we're doing there is mediating at a local level with communities. At the same time, we have been involved in training rebel groups in negotiations with Burundi for the negotiations there, in the DRC for those negotiations, in Somalia, in Sudan and that's at the higher level. That's from the mediation side. On peacekeeping, we are involved quite heavily with the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the African Union's peacekeeping operations on the civilian aspects of peacekeeping. We've developed the civil affairs handbook for the UN and we've done lots of training in civilian aspects of peacekeeping for all of the UN missions in Africa and all of the African Union missions. Then we have a peace-building component. It's quite varied. We have a large knowledge production component. Last year we produced around 40 publications including our two flagship publications. One is a user-friendly magazine for policy makers called *Conflict Trends* and the other is an accredited journal. Both have been now produced for 14 years. Pennsylvania University last year rated ACCORD in the top 100 think tanks in this area. Yes, that's what we do as an institution.

What is the Africa Peace Award?

We're involved in mediation and bringing parties together, and we said at some point you also have to recognize their efforts. That's part of the encouragement, that's part of getting them to sustain those peace agreements. In 1993, we established the Africa Peace Award and we based it on three criteria: the protection of human rights, the good governance of public affairs, and the peaceful settlement of disputes. So if an individual, a community or a nation met any of the three criteria – not all of them, any of the three criteria – they qualify for the award. The Board of Trustees of ACCORD sits and makes that decision. In 1993, we gave it to a local community and

that's really when we started it. We highlighted the peace efforts of a local community in South Africa during the height of the South African conflict. These were two opposing groups and the leaders of that community on the two opposing sides came together to make peace and we decided to reward them for that. We brought the former president of Nigeria, President Obasanjo to make the award on our behalf. It was a small event of 200 people, but it captured the imagination of the nation. It got the first item on the news and that gave us the idea that we should then expand this. In 1997, we gave the award to Nelson Mandela. He was then president of South Africa and we wanted to raise the profile of the award and recognize his efforts. This really raised the profile of the award. We got the Secretary General of the then Organization of African Unity to come and make the award on our behalf. We had 500 guests. To date, we've given the award to Mozambique as a nation, to both the ruling party and the opposition. President Chissano came with Raul Domingos, the second in command of RENAMO (the opposition group). British Aerospace gave us a plane and we flew 200 Mozambicans to the ceremony to indicate that peace was not made by the president but by the people of Mozambique. Subsequent awards were given to Nigeria for its move from military rule to civilian rule. We highlighted one year the plight of child soldiers by focusing on them. We gave the award to Burundi for its efforts at peacemaking. The last award was given to Sierra Leone for having come through a violent past and having had two successive elections. This year, the award was given to Ghana. This is really what the essence of the award is. It is to recognize the peace efforts, as well as efforts at good governance. Ghana for example has done extremely well in dealing with corruption and improved governance in the country. This is one of the reasons we're recognizing it.

What is the Global Peace initiative?

We've just created now a new entity called Global Peace, and Global Peace is an initiative that we hope will be a catalyst for two types of conversations. The first is a conversation that we hope will take place between leaders that are currently in power, those that are between the ages of 45 and 65 who are the presidents, ministers, CEOs of companies or NGOs, and who are in a position to influence the direction of this world. We want them to have a conversation about shaping a better world. What is that social contract that we need to evolve between the three social forces of society -- the private sector, civil society and the nation-state? What's the social contract that will allow us to mediate our differences in a way that we build a more cooperative world, a world in which we see our problems as global problems that require global solutions? That's the first conversation and we want that conversation to take place and we're trying to mobilize like-minded people the initiative. We've asked Martti Ahtisaari, the former president of Finland, and Graça

Machel, a prominent African woman, to coach and they have agreed to coach in the initiative. We're busy mobilizing people around the world and we've talked to a number of leaders around the world and they're all signed up to it. That's the one conversation. It's a conversation about a social contract but it's also a conversation between the North and the South, hence Martti Ahtisaari and Graça Machel to say, "Let's find common cause between the North and the South about creating a better world." The second group of people that we want to have a conversation with is young people. These are people who have unprecedented power through social media today. So we've assembled a group of young people and we've said to them mobilize the best brains in their 20s who are key movers and shakers, and these three young people that we employed have already brought together 20 key movers and shakers from around the world. For example, the young man who was at the center of the Tahrir Square protest in Egypt who was one of the co-founders of the April 6 movement. He's on board. We've got a young Brazilian, a Sri Lankan, a Nigerian, a Kenyan, an East German, an American. We're bringing them all together and by March, I'm told by the three young people, they will have 100 of these young people. What do we want them to talk about? We want them to have a conversation about what world they want to see in the future and for them to tell these global leaders, "This is the world we'd like you to leave for us," and for these global leaders to then have a conversation to say, "How do we then meet the aspirations of these young people so that we leave a better world for them?" That's the new initiative that we are launching.

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Vasu Gounden is the founder and Executive Director of the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) in Durban, South Africa. He is a lawyer and a mediator, trainer and researcher in the field of conflict resolution. He has served on several Government commissions and independent bodies and has been involved in mediation work both in South Africa and globally. His achievements have led the World Economic Forum to elect him as one of their Global Leaders for Tomorrow (GLT).

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